ISSUE 02 | SEPTEMBER 2017

ARANYA

BY

Hyderabad Birding Pals | Friends of Flora & Fauna

Cover Story

A Dream Day with Bonelli's Eagle

In this issue

AranyA has taken its second baby step with this issue. It was launched out of a desire to showcase all the activities of Hyderabad Birding Pals (HBP) and Friends of Flora and Fauna do in the month. HBP has so many passionate birders and photographers that their effort needed a platform. Thanks to the initiative of senior members making this magazine possible.

August is a sibling of July with rain and lush green cover. Dark clouds diminish the sunlight but then there is no bad season for bird watching and conservation activities. Yes, nobody will like their shoe get heavy with mud while birding unless, you see all with the same difficulty and laugh it off. This month had regular Sunday bird walks, a photo exhibition and a conservation event. The clean and beautiful landscape of Himayat Sagar gave the presence of Sandpipers. Uma Maheshwaram charmed with Yellow Throated Bulbul and Ananthagiri Hills had many Flycatcher sightings. Ameenpur lake marvelled the members with the presence of Spot-billed Pelican. A unique initiative of Lake Commandos was launched by TSSPF and HBP to save the lakes from the pollution caused during Ganesh festival. Our cover story is a thrilling encounter of HBP members with Bonelli's Eagle with a prey. There is a write up on basics of post processing for beginners in photography to get some tips.

Hope you like this issue. All for Birds and Wildlife.

- Ajinkya Supekar

ARANYA
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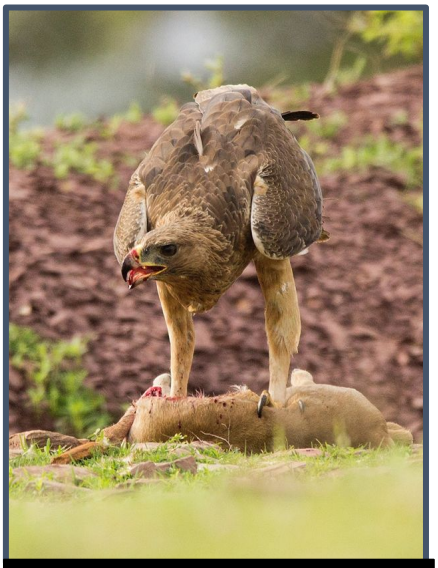


A Dream Day with Bonelli's Eagle 18

HBP Bird Walks – August

163rd Bird Walk | Himayat Sagar Lake

6th August 2017

164th Bird Walk | Uma Maheshwaram

13th August 2017

165th Bird Walk | Ananthagiri Hills

20th August 2017

166th Bird Walk | Ameenpur Lake

27th August 2017

Trip Report

By Shekar Vishvanath

163rd Bird Walk at Himayat Sagar

I came to Hyderabad recently on transfer. Before leaving for Hyderabad, in my earlier place of posting I asked my Birding friends about reference to any birding group in Hyderabad. One of them promptly gave me the reference of Hyderabad Birding Pals (HBP). On landing in Hyderabad I immediately got in touch with HBP. The HBP took me on board and invited me to birding walks without delay.

The first walk that I went for was Narasapur Forest, followed by Himayat Sagar walk on 06/08/2017. For the Himayat Sagar walk on 06/08/2017, at about 6 am, we assembled at Vamsi Krishna Hotel on Mehdipatnam Chevella road and embarked on the bird watching expedition.

The Himayat Sagar reservoir was formed, when the Nizam completed the construction of a dam on a tributary to Musi river to provide drinking water to the residents of Hyderabad. This picturesque lake is visited by many water birds. The backwater area of the lake has grassland and it is also a good spot to spot many birds.

On the day of our walk, the ground was dry and not slushy. The weather was very pleasant. We were very eager to sight Rain Quail which is the flavor of the season. We could hear their call all around us but it was difficult to sight them as the grass had grown a bit taller. The rain quail is also a very shy bird not willing to pose for a photo shoot like a model. Many a time, as we waded through the grass, it would spring just a foot ahead of us, fly away to land in the bush bit further away and vanish.

We also heard few Painted francolins teasing us with the call “Tracado” but not easily seen. On the tree side of the backwater area, we saw male Baya weaver birds trying to tempt its female partner to check its nest. In the water body we saw many Eurasian Coots, River Terns, Greater Flamingos, Purple herons, Grey Herons etc. On the grass land side we came across plenty of Sykes larks, Ashy Sparrow larks, Oriental Skylarks, Zitting Cisticolas, Prinias etc. We also saw Red Wattled Lapwings as well as Yellow Wattled Lapwings. Many a times Red Wattled Lapwing spoiled our chance of close encounter by circling above our head and alerting other unsuspecting birds of our presence. On a branch of a tree on the lake shore we also saw a couple of Red Rumped Swallows resting. On that day at Himayat Sagar, we were able to sight 82 species.

Thereafter, as our enthusiasm for birding had not come down, we went to Osman Sagar Lake. This too turned out to be interesting with some members crawling on their bellies on the lake shore to get a perfect photograph of flamingos. We untangled an exhausted male Ashy Sparrow lark entangled in an abandoned fishing net left carelessly on the lake shore and allowed the bird to take its flight to freedom. This act of random kindness (ARK) gave us all immense happiness and satisfaction. As far as more details on Osman Sagar, let us keep the Osman Sagar story for some other day.

Himayat Sagar Bird Walk Sightings

Zitting Cisticola

Common Sandpiper

Trip Report

By Abhishek Ravindra

164th Bird Walk at Uma Maheshwaram

Uma Maheshwaram (also known as Maheshwaram and Umamaheshrum) is a temple dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva in Telangana, India. It is in the picturesque Nallamala forest range around 130 kilometers away from Hyderabad on the Hyderabad-Srisailam highway. It is atop the hill properly covered by huge trees. Hill ranges shields the temple and 500 metres of stretch to Papa-Nasanam. Through the day hardly any sunlight falls on this stretch, thus maintaining the temperature below normal year round. It is popularly known as Poor Man's Ooty. Nallamala Range are a section of the Eastern Ghats.

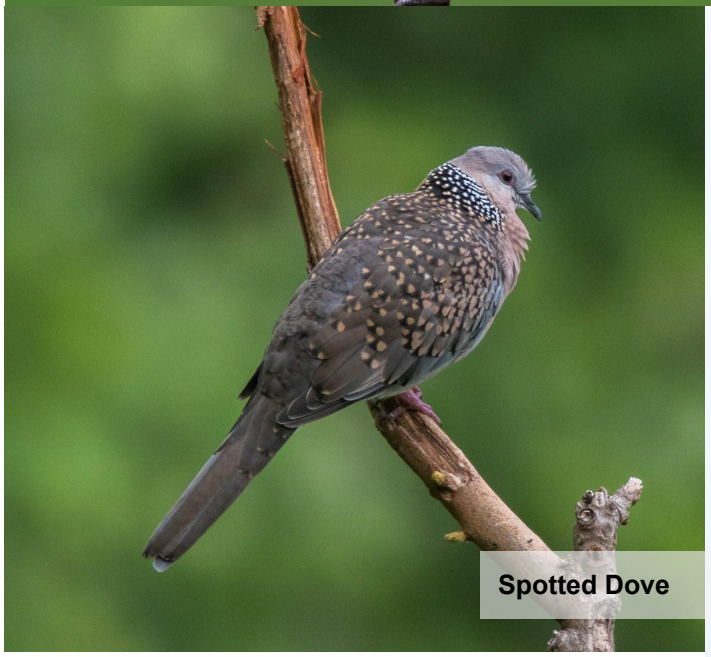
On 13th of August the group started from the meeting point at Srisailam Highway around 4.30am, we started birding at 7am in the Temple area. The diffused sunlight with no rain favoured both the birds and birders. The birds found in this spot is very different from the birds found in the region.Two birders from West Bengal joined HBP for the walk and had an opportunity to spot some Endemic birds to the region.

The activity is very low compared to other seasons due to heavy rains. In- spite of less activity the group photographed and reported Yellow throated Bulbul, Golden Fronted Leafbird, a pair of Bonelli's eagles, Imperial Green Pigeons, both Red Rumped Swallows and Dusky Crag Martins were busy picking the nesting material and few other resident species.Due to heavy rains the undergrowth had drastically increased which made it difficult to spot the birds and the availability of water throughout the hill had scattered the bird population.

After finishing the morning birding session by 10 AM few members went ahead to Mallela Theertham which is 30 kms from Uma Maheshwaram in the Nallamalla Range.We were Greeted by couple of Indian-Scops Owl followed by couple of Jerdon's Nightjar which were seen on the slopes adjacent to the stream which was covered with Murraya koenigii commonly known as curry leaves. Overall it was a good day for birding and we reported 63 species, since this is a hotspot which is least explored, we will host bird walks in all the seasons to understand the habitat and keep a note of migratory species.

Uma Maheshwaram Bird Walk Sightings

Yellow Throated Bulbul



Spotted Dove

Green Imperial Pigeon

Trip Report

By Ajinkya Supekar

165th Bird Walk at Ananthagiri Hills

Ananthagiri hills is a dense forest area known for Sri Anantha Padmanabha Swamy Temple and as an origin of Musi river. It is located 80 km from Hyderabad close to Vikarabad. It has deciduous forest cover with an adjoining grassland area. About 260 bird species have been reported on ebird from this location with new species being added every season.

Hyderabad Birding Pals (HBP) conducted 165th bird walk on Sunday, 20th August with the motive to check for Cuckoos and the change of habitat in Monsoon. Though the absence of migrants will reduce the length of the bird checklist, the seasonal activity of birds and excellent green cover compensates to it. Thirteen members participated. Weather was cloudy and rained in the afternoon.

Everyone gathered at APPA junction and proceeded to Vikarabad through Chavella route. Sri Anantha Padmanabha Swamy Temple is 5 km from Vikarabad. The usual birding spot is the forest down the steps from this temple. Near the temple there were White-bellied Drongos, Rose ringed Parakeets, Indian Gray Hornbills and Coppersmith Barbets. Over numerous bird walks HBP has identified places in the forest where we have been seeing specific birds regularly. So much so that we have called Brown Fish Owl 'attendance bird' as it was seen on many bird walks on the same mango tree, staring at us as if noting our presence. There are specific places to see Mottled Wood Owl, Nightjars, Indian Pitta, Orange headed Thrush and Woodpeckers to name a few. Also, Ananthagiri is a place where every week and month you'll see different things. The forest is dry and open in summer and monsoon has a thick green cover and fog. The stream from the temple starts to flow and this stays until winter. First we checked for Owls on the Mango trees and the area around. Got Mottled Wood Owl which flew towards its usual spot, further ahead. We heard calls of Brown Fish Owl from a thicket.

The stream in the forest had started to flow, this will attract many birds in the future. But now there were few birds around. Asian Brown Flycatcher was near the Banyan tree and further ahead we spotted more with Brown-breasted Flycatcher. It was overcast and the light was low, therefore we decided to go to the grassland. The way towards it goes passed the nightjar spot, here we saw a lone Yellow footed Green Pigeon on a bare tree. The eucalyptus plantation had Tawny bellied Babblers scanning the undergrowth and a pair of Eurasian collared Dove was flushed. The grassland had new grass and shrubs grown and the bushes had grown thick. We marvelled at how quickly the landscape had changed in few weeks. The stream from the forest comes here and is joined by other streams with dense tree cover in them. The terrain is rocky and undulating. Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo and Pied Cuckoo were calling.

Trip Report

By Ajinkya Supekar

An active group of Yellow eyed Babblers were seen on a tree along with a Yellow-crowned Woodpecker scanning tree trunk. Me and RK Balaji flushed a quail, attempted to spot it on the place it landed but then it reminded us of its excellent camouflaging skill. Grey bellied Cuckoo was also seen. Near a stream a Jungle Nightjar was flushed. Some members spotted a Short-toed Snake Eagle on ground and fly away when it noticed them. A Jungle Prinia was calling on top of its voice, so much longinging to get a mate. Two Brahminy Starlings were fighting on ground, probably they were two males testing each other. Bay backed Shrikes and and Indian Bushlarks dominated the field. After hiking up and down the hills we decided to go back to the forest in hope for increased activity.

As we went passed the eucalyptus plantation and into the forest; common Ioras, Indian Paradise flycatcher, Oriental White-eye and Spot-breasted Fantail were seen. A pair of White-naped Woodpecker were also seen. Orange headed Thrush had occupied its nest in the lower canopy. We again looked for Owls with no luck. After this we decided to wind up the bird walk and started to go towards the temple.

This bird walk had fairly good sightings, given the weather condition. All had a good hike with lot of greenery around. The presence of Brown Flycatchers gave a inkling of future arrival of winter migrants. A total of 71 bird species were reported

- Ajinkya Supekar

The team for the bird walk

Ananthagiri Hills Bird Walk Sightings

Thick Billed Flowerpecker

Grey Hornbill

Asian Brown Flycatcher

Friendship Day Rescue

Friendship Day Special of HBP

Rescuing of Bird and Lesson Learnt

It was Friendship Day 06th August 2017, Sunday and as per the schedule HBP had organized **163rd Birdwalk** at Himayatnagar Lake. It was really a great session at Himayatsagar Lake but still Phani Krishna decided to move Osman Sagar Lake for more exploration; as it was little late but still we thought for exploring the lake as thirst never ends in HBP team.

As we were walking on very thin track and passing through bushes looking at quails, eurasian thick-knee, blue tailed bee-eaters, flamingos, nesting of river terns and lots of larks. While walking we came across many fishing nets in the pathway and suddenly Vyom (my son, just 13 years of age) noticed one of the Ashy Crowned Sparrow Lark entangled in one of the fishing net. Vyom is very caring of birds and has enthusiasm to learn about birds and even identifying few of them while on the walk. He pointed to Pals looking at the entangled bird; Phani Krishna and Praveen Kumar started rescuing Ashy Crowned Sparrow Lark – Male, which was badly stuck-up in the fishing net. The net was passing twice through its neck-line even claws and lower body was also in the net. Phani Krishna has asked for the cutter or any sharp object which can cut the net easily without endangering the bird, but nobody in the group was having, in fact he called for the help to Abhishek as they were on the way. Even we tried other experiments like sharp stone or stick, but unfortunately nothing worked. Now the only option left was to use the hands to cut the fishing net. So, Phani Krishna was holding the bird gently and Praveen Kumar started to cut the net with his nails and hands. In-between Phani Krishna asked water for the bird, so Vyom helped them in the cap of the bottle but as the bird was entangled badly and scared didn't drink at all. In the meantime the process of freeing the bird was going on.

Fortunately after lot many efforts bird was rescued from the fishing net but could not fly, as the wings were wounded beneath. Again Vyom tried to provide water to the bird; now to everybody's surprise, bird started to drink. Again Phani Krishna helped bird's wing to regain the original shape while on grassland for flying and it worked. Innocent Lark flew away to rejoice the freedom again. It was "***BIG YES"*** from everyone and all were very happy and that's the way HBP celebrated the Friendship Day and greeted each other.

Lesson Learnt – While going for any wildlife or birding we should keep scissor or cutter and water which will quench our thirst as well as someone else too…..

I would like to conclude with a quote – ***"Everything in life is a blessing, however, sometime we have to work through a lesson or challenge to earn it."***

Proud Member of HBP Team - Bhaarat Vyas

Friendship Day Rescue

Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark being relieved from fishing net by HBP members

Picture Courtesy – Phani Krishna & Vyom Vyas

India Bird Photo Exhibition

On 19th August, 1839, the French Academy of Sciences bought the patent for the Daguerreotype, the first practical photographic process. This was announced as a “free gift” to the world and thus this is marked by the celebration of World Photography Day. This day inspires photographers around the world to share an image which can bring a change in lives of people. India has more than a thousand bird species and no wonder photographers are attracted to click images of them. From Indian mythology and culture to their role as indicators of climate change- birds hold a key place.

To showcase this importance, Hyderabad Birding Pals organized India Birds Photo Exhibition at Hotel Marigold, Ameerpet, Hyderabad on this day. It was inaugurated by Mrs. Tejdeep Kaur Menon, DGP, Telangana Special Protection Force. She is a powerhouse of lake conservation efforts in Hyderabad and is duly recognised for her work by receiving the ‘Wind under the Wings’ award by Sanctuary Asia magazine.

With all the colours, grace and charm, birds can be our closest connect to nature. This was effectively conveyed by the collection of bird images in the exhibition. The photographers explained how the image was taken and about the place where the bird was seen.

The exhibition was up for display for two days.

World Photography Day

Lake Commandos Event

The Telangana State Special Protection Force (TSSPF) has enlisted government and private high school and college students living in Patancheru and Ameenpur as Lake Commandos to step up conservation of the Ameenpur lake system in the run up to the Ganesh Utsav festivities and Nimajjanam.

Volunteers, sporting exclusive Lake Commando arm bands, along with the TSSPF officers as well as activists of the Hyderabad Birding Pals (HBP) and the Friends of Flora and Fauna (FoFF) are to go round the residential areas in the vicinity of Ameenpur and adjacent lakes. They are taking up a door-to-door campaign to install eco–friendly Ganesh idols and propagate the message of eco–friendly Ganeshas and about the immersion of idols in the lakes and other areas designated for immersion by the police. They will also keep vigil near the lakes to prevent any unauthorized immersion and redirect the idols to the designated places. In all their efforts, the Lake Commandos will be guided and accompanied by officers of the TSSPF and activists of the HBP and FoFF. Immersion of idols was to be done in Devuni Kunta lake, Beeramguda, Ameenpur Gram Panchayat the marked area where it was done last year.

People were advised not to do immersion in Pedda Cheruvu, Kothacheruvu and Bandamkommu cheruvu of Ameenpur village which are having good bird-life and fish population. Both the Lake Commandos and those accompanying them were to impress upon on everyone about the use of Ganesh idols made of clay only and explain how it is eco – friendly. They were also involved in removing garbage and debris after the Ganesh immersion at all the designated lakes and areas.

The Government of Telangana has declared the Ameenpur lake as a “Biodiversity Heritage Site” under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 in November, 2016. It is the first such water body declared as a Biodiversity Heritage Site in the country and that too in an urban environment. The Ameenpur lakes are one of the few water bodies left in the State of Telangana and known as the Birding Paradise of Telangana. Around 211 species of birds (migratory and residents), 250 plant species (including rare and medicinal), 9 fish species, 26 aquatic beetles, 41 butterfly species, 33 species of invertebrates, 12 amphibian species, 33 reptiles species, 9 species of wild animals and millet diversity is available in the area. Tremendous plant diversity is also available at Ameenpur lake. Encroachment, dumping of garbage, municipal waste, drainage water, rock and sand mining, industrial pollutants, illegal commercial ground water tapping through bore wells, and killing of migratory birds is a threat to the lake.

After 10 days of immersion of Ganesh idols made of Plaster of Paris and painted with toxic colours, the oxygen levels in the lakes decrease to about 50 per cent endangering the life of the flora and fauna in and around the lakes. The Plaster of Paris (POP) used for making of Idols does not dilute in the water after immersion. It pollutes the lakes and destroys the native fishes and other flora species in the water body. By immersing idols made with Plaster of Paris (POP) and painted with chemical paints, we are choking life in and around the lakes and also filling our lakes with plastic bags and other litter accompanying the Ganeshas which is not biodegradable. Every year about one and half lakh idols are being immersed in the lakes situated in and around Hyderabad. The Lake Commandos were launched on the 21st August, 2017 at 10.30 am at Ameenpur, Sanga Reddy Dist.

Lake Commandos Event

A Dream Day with Bonelli's Eagle

15th Aug 2017, Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary, Rollapadu, Kurnool, AP
Vinay Kumar

The Bonelli's eagle (Aquila fasciata) is a large bird of prey. Like all eagles, it belongs to the family Accipitridae. The Bonelli's eagle is found in hilly or mountainous habitats, with rocky walls or crags and open to wooded land, in arid to semi-moist climate, upto 1500m from sea level

This is a medium to large sized eagle, 55–65 cm (22–26 in) in length, with a wingspan of about 150 cm (59 in). The upper parts of the adult are dark brown with a white patch between the wings. From below, the body is white with dark stripes, and the wings are blackish. The long tail is grey on top and white below and has a single broad black terminal band. The feet and eyes are yellow. Immature birds have deep buff underparts and underwing coverts, and have fine barring on the tail without the terminal band. It is usually silent except near the nest.

Bonelli's eagle breeds on crags or large trees, in nests up to 2 m in diameter built up with wood sticks, re-used for many years. The breeding season, in the western part of its range, is from January to July.

Bonelli's eagle usually feeds on small to medium-sized birds, but sometimes also on mammals, reptiles, insects and carrion. It usually hunts from cover by a quick dash from inside a tree, but it will also catch prey by quartering hill slopes like other eagles, or make a stoop from a soaring position. Most prey is taken on the ground. This eagle takes large prey items, usually mammals or birds. Mammals up to the size of a hare are regularly taken, and birds up to guineafowl size. (Source wiki)

We were three photographers- me, Naresh, Anil, along with guide were in search of the Indian fox. We saw him and we were observing slowly to approach him. Suddenly our guide noticed that one raptor sat on ground and when we realize, it already flew away. In flight only we got confirmed that it's Bonelli's eagle. This is my dream raptor to capture. I have been searching for him for decent photographs and never happened to get him before. I thought I got him finally but it suddenly flew away. We thought it went very long and wanted to proceed with Fox again. But our guide told that it had landed near by and we just moved further to check the area. There it is and it's on ground with open wings (Mantling).

A Dream Day with Bonelli's Eagle

We initially thought it was basking sun, as other water birds do generally. After some time we got doubt that it has got some prey. We observed for sometime with patience, without approaching him closely. Then we realized that it has got some prey which is moving slowly and not visible to us due to his open wings. Once we thought it's a big snake and then a hare or some bird. After a lot of struggle, finally the prey passed away and then the eagle stood to give a glimpse of the prey.

Still we were not sure what that prey was and we crossed our fingers. We decided to approach it in other angle and we were quite far from him. Since all of us had around 500mm lens, we could approach him without disturbing it. We slowly moved from another angle and here is what we saw...

A Dream Day with Bonelli's Eagle

It was a Blackbuck Fawn. We could not believe our eyes for some time. I knew that it's a powerful hunter and it hunts many birds, even large birds like herons and storks. And also it feeds on mammals up to the size of hares generally. This we did not expect.

It was really our lucky day to see this rare moment. I was really overwhelmed by watching this. We did not have any other thought and just observed him totally. We spent lot of time with him. After some time it started tearing the prey and eat. I just kept on observing him from viewfinder and sometimes forgot to capture too!

We observed every moment of this eagle- how it was tearing the skin of fawn and how it was observing the area to protect himself and to save the prey from scavengers. Felt it was hard to see this moment like that little fawn was being eaten in front of our eyes. But at the end, it's nature's reality. We stayed at same distance for sometime and then changed our direction and kept observing. Luckily the eagle was habituated with our presence as we spent long time with him without harming.

A Dream Day with Bonelli's Eagle

Although pictures are of not much quality here, I feel now that sometimes experiencing moments are more important than the quality of photographs.

After this we left the place for a while to have coffee. We took some hours of time and came back to see what has happened at the place. When we returned we saw eagle grabbing the prey and moving some distance. It had actually lifted the prey and brought it there. When we saw first time we felt the fawn's leg was up from below picture. But after sometime, we realized that it's eagle leg in a posture as if claiming its prey. There might have some other scavengers arrived earlier and it might have been protecting it from them. Because we noticed fox was moving away from that place when we were arriving. We also heard that it defends/hunts Indian Fox sometimes.

Masai Mara Trip Report

By Jeet Aman

Masai Mara, Kenya (Sunday August 13, 2017 – Saturday August 19th, 2017)

Masai Mara - Let me with start with a confession - I am more humble than ever before after Masai experience.

Masai Mara (also called Maasai Mara or simply Mara) is a dreamland for every wildlife enthusiast - provides a unique version of AranyA (the wilderness). All members of the "Big Five" (Lion, Leopard, African Elephant, Cape Buffalo, and Black Rhinoceros) as well as large number of birds are found in the Maasai Mara. It is a land of equal opportunities and extreme challenges - an infinite grassland - for birds, animals, wildlife enthusiasts, and especially the photographers. It creates or destroys opportunities during every moment of the day and blink of your eyes. It allows one to fail, learn, yet be successful in a short span of time. Right from early morning sunrise on the horizon to the sunset, this is a dreamland of imagination and creativity to clinch every moment with the same subject. It also tastes your patience for hours ruthlessly with no movements between the prey and predator in sight and the action gets over in fraction of seconds.

This AranyA creates ample opportunities to work against tough light conditions – silhouettes and shadows – is the name of the game!

The plan started in January when the team started coming together. It was an opportunity to meet and make few new friends: Sanjay Shukla (Kanha Reserve Park), Jineesh Mallishery (Bangalore), Mayur Dharod (Hyderabad), Shreyas Kumar M (Japan / Bangalore), Dr Sandeep Kaushal (Jodhpur), Max Ali (Hyderabad), Surendra Chouhan (Jaipur), Col Sameer Raut (Aurangabad), Yashpal Rathore (Bangalore), Dr Sanjeev Managoli (Bangalore), Jitender Govindani (Hyderabad), Simon Kararei (Masai Mara). The visit was planned from Sunday August 13th to Saturday August 19th. We all got together in Mumbai on Sunday morning. The Kenya Airways flight from Mumbai to Nairobi starts at 4:30 pm and lands around 8:30 pm (local time) with 6 hours flight time. The overnight stay was planned in Nairobi close to the airport.

The journey started on Monday morning at 5:30 am from the hotel to Masai Mara in the modified Toyota Land Cruisers. It is 250 km journey by the two lane state highway in fairly good condition and takes 7-8 hours. There are chartered flights from Nairobi. It takes an hour to reach Masai Mara by air.

The first stop was planned at Lake Naivasha approx 100 km from Nairobi for bird photography and breakfast. One hour boat ride to various parts of the lake to capture African Fish Eagles and Giant Kingfishers in action and up and close to Hippos at eye level images. After breakfast we started moving to Masai Mara at around 10:00 am. Stopped at Narok city center 145 km from Nairobi for lunch at 11:00 am. And started towards final destination - the Mara - at around 1:00 pm. The last 90 km is a complete off-roading thru' countryside. We reached the border of the Masai Mara National Park at around 4:00 pm. The gears were out to start the action thru' the park while approaching our way to the Malaika Camp - our resort - another 30 km.

Masai Mara Trip Report

Masai Mara in Kenya is the northern extension of the Serengeti grassland in Tanzania. Wildebeest, Topi, Zebra, and Thomson's gazelle migrate into and occupy the Mara reserve, from the Serengeti plains to the south. The vehicles are connected over radio for communication. The guides across Masai Mara and Serengeti constantly share the information on sightings across the grassland; therefore, less chances of one missing any action.

Within 30 mins in the park, there was news of a male Cheetah with the cub sighting. I cannot describe the experience of very first sighting of the beautiful fasted beast on the earth from close proximity. The tear lines on the face of the Cheetah makes it more attractive apart from the fit dynamic body shape. After spending 30 - 40 minutes with the carefree creature, we moved on to next sighting destination. A pair of Leopards - the male adult with the sub-adult cub - were by the waterbody. The guide noticed a carcass of a wildebeest kill hanging on the tree nearby. First the cub went up the tree to finish off the leftover meat. Its attempt to get the carcass down to the ground failed. The Male adult was the next to go up the three to get the carcass down the ground with no luck. The poor light conditions created the challenges to click the wonderful images of the actions by both the Leopards dealing with the carcass on the tree.

It was the dream beginning of Masai Mara. Few absolute great moments were:

- ★ Leopards with a kill carcass on the tree
- ★ Coalition of five male Cheetahs – who gave photography opportunity with three actions – two unsuccessful and one successful with kill
- ★ The Pride with four lionesses and 13 cute lion cubs – thrice during the week
- ★ Critically endangered Black Rhino – twice during the week
- ★ And of course, the India Independence Day celebration in the heart of Mara

The wildlife covered during the visit:

Animals: The "Big Five" (Lion, Leopard, African Elephant, Cape Buffalo, and Black Rhinoceros), Cheetahs (most unique was the coalition of the famous five male Cheetahs in action), Jackals, Giraffe, Hippopotami, Grant's Gazelles, Impalas, Duikers and Coke's Hartebeests, Roan Antelope, Serval Cat, Hyenas.

Birds: Vultures (Rüppell's, White-backed, White-headed, Lappet-Faced – all critically endangered), Marabou storks, Saddle-billed Storks, Secretary birds, Southern Ground Hornbills, Ostriches, Lilac-breasted Roller (the national bird of Kenya), African Sacred Ibis, Superb Starlings, African Fish Eagles, Giants and Pied Kingfishers, White- and Black-bellied Bustards, Egyptian Goose, Long-tailed Cormorant, Pied Crow, Buffalo-Bee Eaters.

Masai Mara Trip Report

The schedule for rest of days was: get up at 4:30 am to get to the lounge area by 5:30 am and in the vehicle by 5:45 am to target a subject to capture silhouettes against the light just before sunrise. Breakfast in the field. It was an experience by itself to have breakfast right in the middle of all actions. The most memorable breakfast was by the bank of Mara river at the Great Migration spot while a Lioness sitting close to a kill at a distance less than 500 meters. This is the place we had an opportunity to meet Anup Shah. He drove down to the spot on the request of guides Yash and Simon.

Back to the camp past noon for lunch. Get back in the vehicle by 3:30 pm to capture the actions in the evening golden light. And end the day capturing the shadows of the subject by the sunset on the horizon.

Gears: All one needs to carry is passion and very basic gears!
Must have are: DX and FX format cameras - one each. Fast lenses covering 20mm - 500mm and a wide angle – max three. There is very less time to switch between the gears. Bean bag is a must.

And most important is the company of a Mara field experienced photography guide as well as knowledgeable local guide. We were absolutely lucky in this aspect.
The weather condition was very pleasant throughout the visit with temperature hovering between 10°C-30°C. Nairobi on high altitude and you move down to grassland approaching Masai Mara. The morning and late evenings are cold.

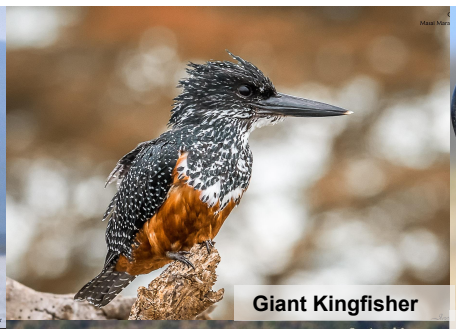
Masai Mara is must experience AranyA. It provides an interesting platform for the wildlife enthusiasts

Go ahead and add Masai Mara to your future itinerary. Best time to visit is: **August – Oct**

This trip was limited to Masai Mara by the group by choice. The alternate plan to visit Kenya especially with the family members for a week can be: Night of arrival at Nairobi. One night at Lake Nakuru - Nakuru has good number of black and white rhinos plus different habitat with good bird life. You may also see Lions up on the tree. One night at Lake Naivasha followed by three nights at Mara. All are in the direction of travel to Masai Mara from Nairobi. If you have two additional days and keen on elephants - a visit to Amboseli is a great option. It is in opposite direction to Masai Mara. Hence, you need to spend a night in Nairobi to cover Amboseli - which takes around 4-5 hours. It provides a good landscape to capture elephants in the backdrop of snow cladded Mount Kilimanjaro in a clear day.

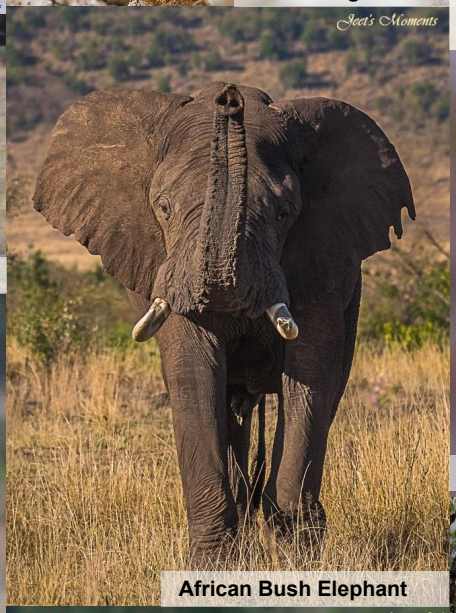
Masai Mara Trip Report

African Fish Eagle


Giant Kingfisher

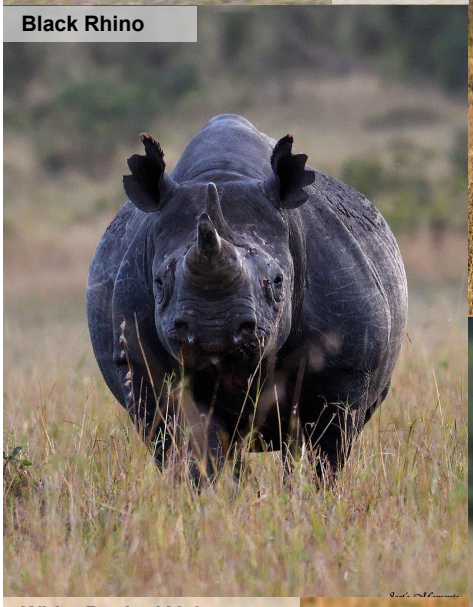
Buffalo with Yellow Billed Oxpecker

Cheetah


African Bush Elephant

Lilac Breasted Roller

Black Rhino


White Backed Vulture

Lion Cubs

Secretarybird

African Lion

Post Processing Basics

By Prasanna Kumar Mamidala

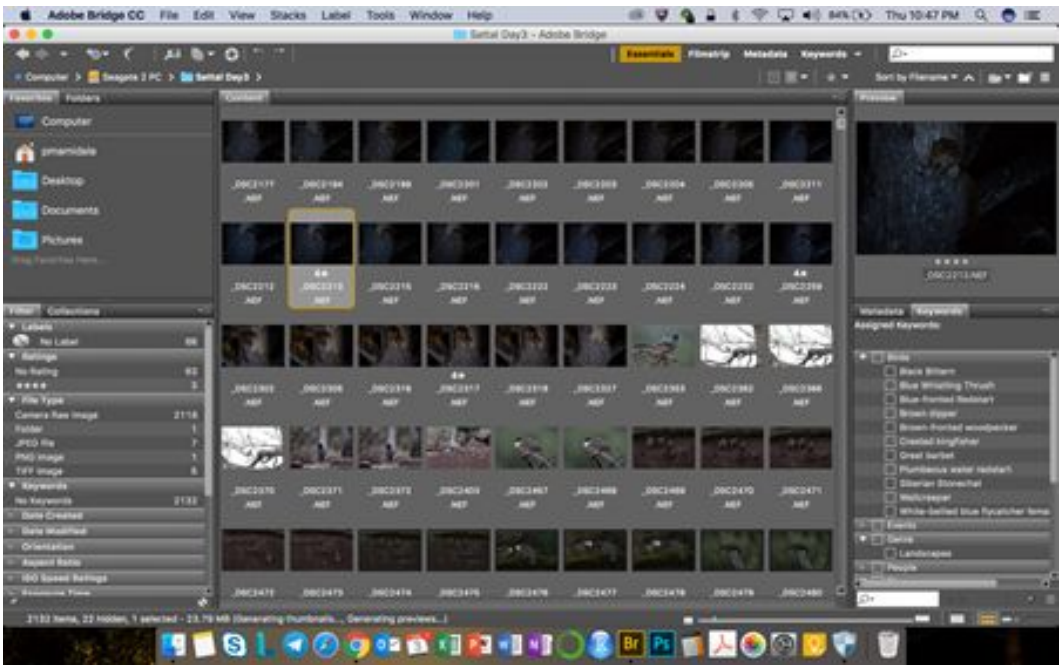
Post processing for Birders/ Wild-lifers

Firstly – I would like to dedicate this to Hyderabad Birding Pals completely as all the techniques I am mentioning here are learnt from fellow birders in this community – starting with Digital asset management session by Phani Krishna – that was my beginning in post processing for birding J! And few tips from gurus like Masood Hussain! Thank you so much HBP!!

1. Digital asset management – More important than what you think!

One of the challenges wildlife photographers face is finding a way to store, organize and search thousands of photos. We need a methodology that allows you to save your photos consistently so they can be searched for later with ease. Cataloging software such as Adobe Bridge and Adobe Lightroom makes this process much easier to manage as it saves preferences and file-naming conventions for consistent application over time. There are other software too – whichever it is, the key is to develop a system that is standardized yet unique enough to identify individual assets.

While many prefer Lightroom, I prefer Adobe Bridge as it is as simple as your windows explorer (or Mac finder).

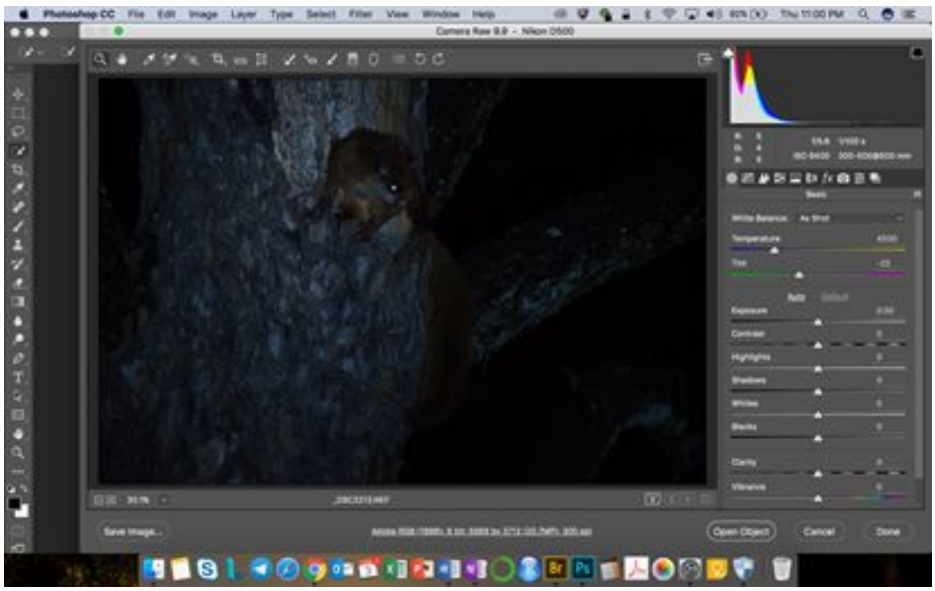


Post Processing Basics

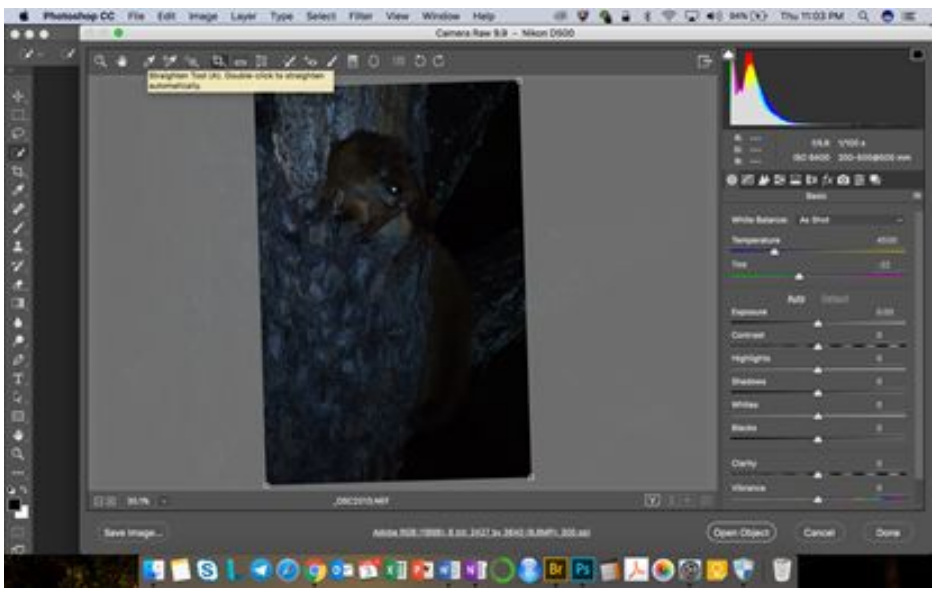
2. Post processing workflow using Adobe Photoshop

[Note that this workflow remains the same in Lightroom]

Open file (I am opening the file of Flying squirrels (scientifically known as Pteromyini or Petauristini) – clicked in Sattal, Uttarakhand, India)

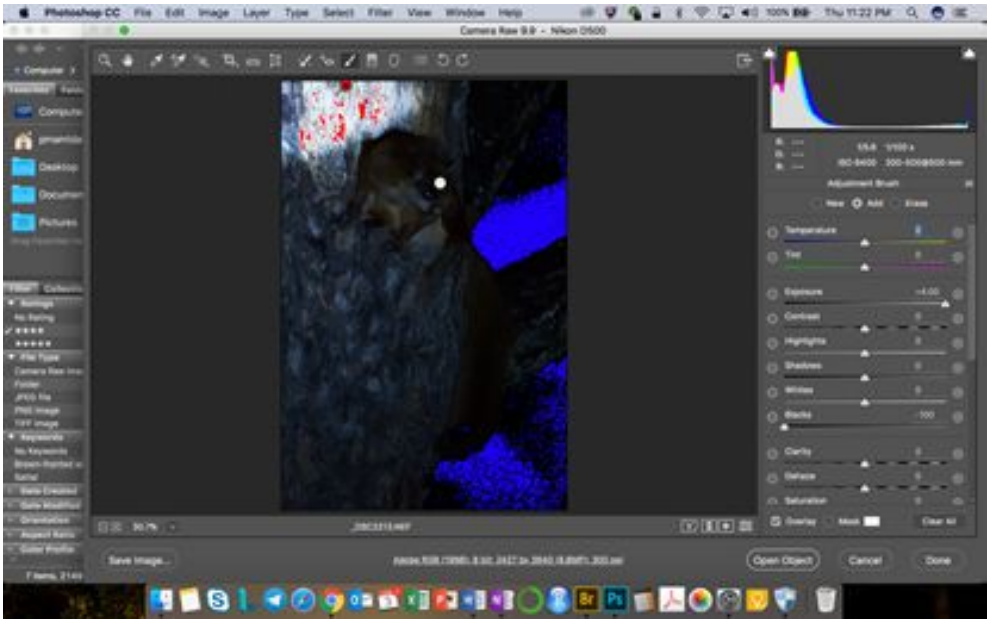


Crop & Straighten

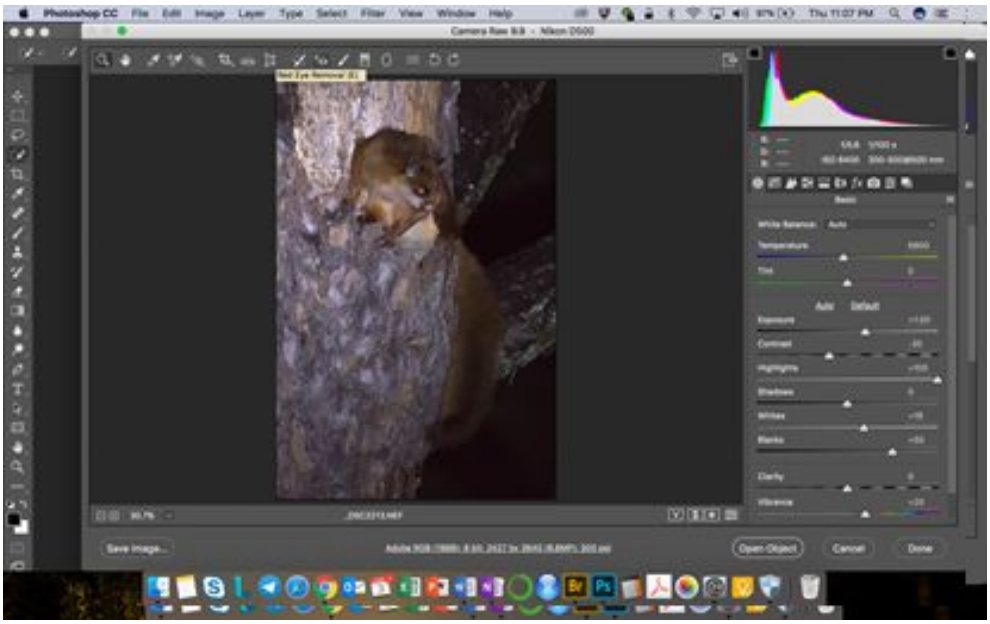


Post Processing Basics

Adjust the white balance (only if required) – in this case I am happy with Auto white balance as you can see here. Then adjust the exposure – I increased it here as my flying squirrel was spotted in pitch dark and I need more exposure in post processing!
Then Adjust contrast, highlights, shadows to your liking. In most of the bird or wildlife photographs, rule of thumb that worked for me is to reduce the highlights and increase shadows. Also – more whites and blacks will be highlighted in red and blue respectively as below (just made sure the reds (highlights) and blacks (shadows) are visible for demonstration purpose) – so all you need to ensure is to make the reds and blues disappear and play further from there! If you adjust highlights and whites – reds will disappear and changing shadows & blacks will make the blues disappear.



here is the modified picture…



Post Processing Basics

And in this case the flying squirrel has red eye and hence I used Red eye correction tool (at the top) in conjunction with brush (at the top) to make adjustments in the eye!

Then I moved to the sharpening and noise reduction tab, and made adjustments as below. If you increase luminance value, the noise will decrease. If you increase it too much, your picture will be too soft. So use this carefully.

That's it – here is my final output; I have done few more simple modifications using Google Nik collection plugin for Photoshop and here is my final output. Including the original file at the left to make you understand the power of post processing:

Before

After

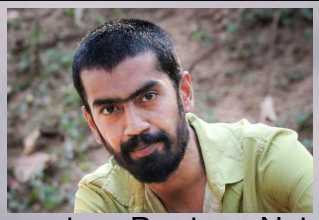
Photographer's Corner

Bonelli's Eagle

Photographer: Vinay Kumar Navulla
Place: Rollapadu, Kurnool

Photographer's Corner

Oriental Darter



Photographer: Pradeep Nair
Place: Ameenpur, Hyderabad

Photographer's Corner

Brahminy kite

Photographer: Sriram Reddy
Place: Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh

Photographer's Corner

Great Egret

There were two Great Egrets enjoying fishes to their glory this one of them who loved tossing its meal more than the other. It played around for 20 secs before gulping it completely down through its long curved neck.

Photographer: Soumyajit Basu
Place: Ameenpur Lake,Hyderabad

Photographer's Corner

African Leopard

Photographer: Jeet Aman
Place: Masai Mara, Kenya

African Leopard with Blue Wildebeest Kill

Jeet's Moments

Photographer's Corner

Red Rumped Swallow

Photographer: Kishore Bakshi
Place: Chiplun,India

Important Sightings of The Month

The lesser florican is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent where it is found in tall grasslands and is best known for the leaping breeding displays made by the males during the Monsoon season.

Lesser florican (*Sypheotides indicus*)
Conservation Status: Endangered

Naresh Vadrevu
Kurnool, AP

Important Sightings of The Month

Indian pitta collecting worms to feed its chicks. It inhabits scrub jungle, deciduous and dense evergreen forest. A terrestrial colourful bird, sexes look alike. Resident in Indian subcontinent with seasonal migratory movement. It hops about on the ground like a thrush, rummaging amongst the dead leaves. Can be easily identified by its call.

Indian Pitta(*Pitta brachyura*)
Conservation Status: Least Concern

Prasanna Kumar Mamidala
Chiplun, Maharashtra

Important Sightings of The Month

Southern Grey Shrike favors open country of various kinds, from semi-desert to farmland, and from health and bogs to partly forest tundra, with scattered trees, bushes or shrubs. It needs open areas with lots of lookout points..

Southern grey shrike (*Lanius meridionalis*)
Conservation Status: Least Concern

Sriram Reddy
Rollapadu, AP

Important Sightings of The Month

The boldly streaked breast of the male identifies the species. Female and non-breeding males are dark brown above with fulvous streaks. Affects flat, swampy and rain-flooded land and riverbeds, especially reeds standing in water. Nest is a rather loosely woven structure of coarse grass strips like the Baya's but, smaller, rounder and comparatively roughly finished without the elongated entrance tube.

Streaked Weaver (*Ploceus Manyar*)
Conservation Status: Least Concern

Santosh Kumar
Manjeera Dam , Telangana

Important Sightings of The Month

This is a male, entirely black with chestnut wings and the female is olive-brown with dark brown streaks. It is a common resident, local in hills subjected to vertical movement. Affects dry stony sparsely scrubbed hillsides, particularly fond of charred grass patches where its colouration is highly obliterative. Feeds on ground and commonly perches on rocks or bushes.

Crested Bunting (*Melophus Lathami*)
Conservation Status: Least Concern

Mangesh Thakur
Yavatmal , Maharashtra

Important Sightings of The Month

Barred Buttonquail is a great sulker, flushed with difficult only when almost trodden on. It is found in scrub and grassland usually in pairs. This is a female with black throat and barrings on under body.

Barred Buttonquail (*Turmix Suscitator*)
Conservation Status: Least Concern

Sundereswaran R
Hampi, Karnataka

Credits & Contact

Content Contributors:
Ajinkya Supekar
Shekar Vishvanath
Bharat Vyas
Vinay Kumar
Jeet Aman
Prasanna kumar Mamidala
Phani Krishna Ravi
Y.S.R.K. Prasad

Photo Contributors:
Sriram Reddy
Naresh Vadrevu
Vinay Kumar
Shekar Vishvanath
Kishore Bakshi
Prasanna kumar Mamidala
Jeet Aman
Pradeep Nair
Soumyajit Basu
Santosh Kumar
Mangesh Thakur
Phani Krishna Ravi
Raghavarao Suryadevara
Abhishek Ravindra
Sundareswaran R

Cover Photograph: Naresh Vadrevu

For Feedback, Contributions or More Information, Please Contact:

Hyderabad Birding Pals

hyderabadbirdingpals@gmail.com

www.hyderabadbirdingpals.com

https://www.facebook.com/groups/HyderabadBirdingPals/

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